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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003063

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SUBJECT: DEMISTURA VISIT TO IRAN: OPPOSITION TO SOFA,
PRAISE FOR MALIKI

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Senior Iranian leaders told SRSYG DeMistura during his recent visit to Iran that, given improved security conditions, there is no longer a need for a foreign troop presence in Iraq. The Iranians were adamantly opposed to the U.S.-Iraq Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and said UNSCR Chapter 7 on Iraq must be abolished. President Ahmadi-Nejad urged that there be "more of the UN and less of the US in Iraq," and said stability in Iraq was in Iran's interest, since this would hasten a U.S. withdrawal. Ahmadi-Nejad also praised Prime Minister Maliki's efforts to strengthen central government authority. DeMistura said Iran and Turkey have reached a unified position on Kirkuk, and that he suspects the two have conveyed this joint position to Maliki, which has emboldened him vis-a-vis the Kurds. DeMistura noted that none of his interlocutors raised the MEK, a possible indication that this issue has become less resonant for the Iranians. DeMistura and the Ambassador also discussed provincial elections and Kurdish issues; these will be reported septel. END SUMMARY

Trip to Iran: Chapter 7 and SOFA

2. (C) UNSYG Special Representative Staffan DeMistura told the Ambassador September 20 that during his recent trip to Tehran the Iranians gave him a warm welcome and consistent talkiQ points: UNSCR Chapter 7 on Iraq must be abolished, and the U.S.-Iraq Status of Force AgrQment (SOFA) is a Qd idea. Di Mistura met with senior Iranian leaders, including President Ahmadi-Nejad, NSC Director Larijani, and Foreign Minister Motakki. On Chapter 7, DeMistura replied that it is up to the Iraqis to request this and then for the Security Council to decide.

3. (C) As for the SOFA, DeMistura said the Iranians stressed the importance of preserving Iraqi sovereignty, arguing that the improved security situation has eliminated the need for foreign troops and thus for a SOFA. The SRSYG acknowledged security improvements but said Iraq is not yet stable. The Iranians urged that UN troops replace American forces, asserting that this support for Iraqi sovereignty would restore the UN's damaged reputation. DeMistura replied that he would be surprised if the Iraqis accepted such an arrangement, which might also be considered as an infringement on Iraq's sovereignty. In any case, he said, the SOFA is not a UN issue. DeMistura also related that, at the Prime Minister's request, he had conveyed to his Iranian interlocutors the GOI request that Iran not pressure Iraq publicly or privately on the SOFA.

4. (C) DeMistura said that he told Ahmadi-Nejad very directly that Iraq does not want interference from its neighbors, including Iran. Ahmadi-Nejad said he understood this, but that Saudi Arabia and Turkey, not Iran, are the source of Iraqi concern. Reiterating Iran's opposition to the presence of foreign troops in Iraq, Ahmadi-Nejad urged that there be "more of the UN and less of the U.S." and said

stability in Iraq was in Iran's interest, since this would hasten a U.S. withdrawal. Commenting on Iraq's internal politics, Ahmadi-Nejad praised Prime Minister Maliki. Iraq needs a strong central government, he said, and Maliki is working to achieve that. DeMistura said other Iranian officials had echoed these positive comments on and Iranian support for Maliki.

15. (C) The Ambassador noted that it was surprising that the Iranians are taking positions that anyone with a cursory knowledge of the UN knows are not in DeMistura's purview. He also found it odd that the Iranians were advocating positions that, even if they were possible, the Iraqis would oppose.

Iranian-Turkish Understanding on Kirkuk

16. (C) DeMistura said it was clear from his talks that Iran and Turkey have reached an understanding on Kirkuk. He said the Iranians told him there have been bilateral meetings, that Iran appreciates Turkish concerns, and that Iran understands why Turkey would not hesitate to intervene should the KRG try to annex Kirkuk. DeMistura said he suspects the Turks and Iranians have conveyed this joint position to Maliki, and that this has served to embolden the Prime Minister vis-a-vis the Kurds.

UNAMI Liaison Office

17. (C) DeMistura said the Iranians were unenthusiastic in response to his informal query about the possibility of

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establishing a UNAMI liaison office in Tehran. Given that there is already a UN Resident Coordinator in Tehran, DeMistura said he didn't see a need for a separate UNAMI liason office or UNAMI Ambassador, but would recommend to UN Headquarters that a junior officer be posted under the UN Resident coordinator in Tehran to monitor and report on the press, assist on UNAMI-related issues, and help with SRSYG visits. The Ambassador agreed on the inadvisability of a high-profile UNAMI presence in Tehran. This would send the wrong political signal and hinder U.S.-UNAMI coordination efforts.

Political Observations

18. (C) DeMistura noted that the visit was interesting not only for what the Iranians raised, but for what they didn't raise. For example, the MEK never came up, which he took to be an indication that this is no longer a hot-button issue for the Iranians. DeMistura noted with interest that his interlocutors did not mention Moqtada al-Sadr, either, which he interprets as evidence that the Iranians do not consider him an important political player.

19. (C) DeMistura also recounted how his trip to Iran was a near disaster. The UN had arranged a direct flight of the SRSYG's plane from Baghdad to Tehran with civilian Iranian air traffic officials. However, at the moment the plane entered Iranian air space, the Iranian air force ordered it to reverse course within 20 seconds or be shot down. The UN team later discovered that the Iranian military was in the midst of conducting three-day war games with an antiaircraft component. The team changed course and flew via Kuwait. DeMistura pointed to the lack of coordination between Iranian civilian and military air traffic officials as emblematic of the lack of communication and coordination between Iran's diffuse power centers.

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